

NEWS RELEASE



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**U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
ANNOUNCES PROJECT SAFE CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE**

*United States Attorneys and Louisiana Attorney General
Committed to Protecting Children*

Louisiana's Initiative Highlighted

LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA—Louisiana's three United States Attorneys and the Louisiana Attorney General today pledged the resources of their offices to combat the rising tide of internet-based exploitation and victimization of children by sexual predators as well as those who produce, distribute, or possess child pornography.

US Attorneys Donald W. Washington (Western District of Louisiana), David Dugas (Middle District of Louisiana), and Jim Letten (Eastern District of Louisiana) along with Louisiana Attorney General Charles C. Foti, Jr. and various federal, state and local agencies gathered today to announce their support of the nationwide U.S. Department of Justice initiative. The program called "Project Safe Childhood" (PSC) was introduced by U.S. Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales in February 2006, and formally rolled out in June 2006 during a press conference in Washington D.C.

As technology advances and as the Internet becomes more accessible, the number of computer-facilitated sexual exploitation crimes committed against children – including child pornography offenses and enticement crimes – is expected to continue to grow but will face aggressive federal, state, and local law enforcement action. It is believed that one in four children receive unwanted exposure to sexually explicit material each year. Studies have found that approximately one in five children per year receives an

unwanted sexual solicitation while online. Only a fraction of all episodes are reported to authorities. Yet, according to a recent media report, at any given time, 50,000 predators are prowling the Internet for potential child victims.

WESTERN DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA :

The early stages of Louisiana's initiation of Project Safe Childhood has produced several arrests and prosecutions involving persons from many walks of life. Today in the Western District of Louisiana, US Attorney Washington announced the unsealing of eleven federal indictments and the filing of one criminal complaint against individuals on various child exploitation and child pornography possession charges. **Attached is a list of those indicted and the charges** they face in federal court under the Project Safe Childhood initiative.

An indictment is merely an accusation and the defendants are innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The investigations and arrests of these individuals was a joint effort by the United States Attorney's Office, the Louisiana Attorney General's Office, U.S. Marshal Service, U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Customs, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Louisiana State Police, Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office, Beauregard Parish Sheriff's office, Rapides Parish Sheriff's Office, Lafayette Police Department, DeRidder Police Department, and the Morgan City Police Department.

To date in this calendar year, the Western District of Louisiana has indicted 22 defendants, including those arrested this week. In addition to those prosecutions, the United States Attorney's office for the Western District of Louisiana has been working closely with the Louisiana Attorney General's office to educate parents and students of the dangers lurking on various internet sites intended to be used by children. In order to extend the education effort, the Western District Project Safe Childhood Coordinator has also been teaching at police academies around the state and at victim-witness coordinator conferences to educate victim-witness coordinators on their roles in the investigation of sex offenders. Training has also been provided on topics covering the fair treatment of, and counseling for, the victims of sexual abuse. Consistent with the directive from the Attorney General of the United States, Assistant U.S. Attorneys Luke Walker and Earl Campbell have been tasked to fully coordinate the enforcement, training, outreach, and accountability prongs of Project Safe Childhoods.

U.S. Attorney Washington stated, "Let this be a wake up call to those who would exploit children for their sexual gratification, and to those who victimize children through the production and distribution of child pornography. No matter who you are, what you have, or what you do, we will charge and seek maximum jail time if you commit these grave and unforgivable crimes against children. My office and associated federal agencies will aggressively investigate, pursue, and prosecute those who would commit these horrid crimes."

MIDDLE DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA:

In the Middle District of Louisiana, the FBI established the Louisiana Cybercrimes Task Force in August of 2003. The Task Force includes agents and officers from the Louisiana State Police, the LSU Police Department, the Baton Rouge Police Department, the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office and the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office. The work of that Task Force has resulted in the prosecution of several

prominent individuals on child pornography charges and the conviction of one individual with the enticement and transportation of a minor across state lines for sexual purposes. The Task Force also worked with the Louisiana Attorney General's office on cyber crime investigations and prosecutions.

U. S. Attorney David R. Dugas said, "We will attack child pornography and other forms of sexual exploitation of children in an aggressive, coordinated and effective manner throughout Louisiana. These crimes victimize our most vulnerable and precious resource, our children, and we will do every thing within our power to bring these offenders to justice."

EASTERN DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA:

In the past six months, the United States Attorney's office for the Eastern District of Louisiana has indicted and convicted four (4) other individuals for crimes against children. Those individuals include **RUSSELL COUNTERMAN**, age 44, of New Orleans, who just this past Monday, June 19, 2006, pled guilty to possession of child pornography. **COUNTERMAN**, while a school teacher at Patrick F. Taylor Math and Science Academy in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, downloaded and possessed approximately 590 files which contained sexually explicit images of children. Following an investigation and interview of **COUNTERMAN**, FBI Special Agents located *in his classroom* computer equipment which contained images depicting explicit sexual victimization of minors.

On May 23, 2006, **JOSEPH TARDO**, age 50, of Metairie, Louisiana was sentenced to a term of imprisonment of twelve and one half (12 ½ years) followed by a term of supervised release for life. **TARDO** pled guilty on February 23, 2006, to possessing movies depicting the sexual victimization of children.

Also recently convicted of possessing materials involving the sexual exploitation of children were **JAMES PLAISANCE** of Raceland, Louisiana and **JOHN CONNELL**, of Houma, Louisiana. **PLAISANCE** pled guilty to possessing approximately 100 images of child pornography on April 5, 2006. Sentencing in the **PLAISANCE** case is scheduled for July 26, 2006 before United States District Judge Stanwood Duval. **JOHN CONNELL** pled guilty to a February 16, 2006 indictment charging him with possession of child pornography. Sentencing in the **CONNELL** case is set for June 28, 2006.

United States Attorney Jim Letten stated:

"As pornographers and other predators seek increasingly to exploit our avenues of communication and commerce, particularly through the internet, in trafficking in dangerous and sexually explicit images of children, and who further endanger children through exploitation and enticement, we in law enforcement must be aggressive and vigilant in using every means at our disposal to identify, investigate, prosecute, punish and ultimately deter such abhorrent, dangerous and degrading conduct.

Therefore, consistent with the directives of our Attorney General, I have appointed Assistant U. S. Attorney Brian Klebba as our *Project Safe Childhood* (PSC) Coordinator, and we have developed and localized plans for implementation of PSC. Moreover, using a successful template developed in Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) and relying on

joint investigations and critical partnerships with our federal, state and local partners, we will:

- seek and produce greater integration of law enforcement efforts;
- locally execute leads from national and international operations;
- increase federal involvement in child pornography and enticement cases;
- train federal, state and local law enforcement in order to increase investigative efficiency; and
- foster more community awareness and educational programs.”

STATE OF LOUISIANA:

_____ Louisiana Attorney General Charles C. Foti, Jr. Stated, “I am pleased to be part of this collaborative effort to protect our children from those who may try to harm them using the Internet. I fully support the excellent work being performed by the state, local, and federal officers and prosecutors involved in our Internet Crimes Against Children task force. Let this serve as a warning that those who use the Internet to harm our children will be caught and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law,”

THE NATIONAL PROJECT SAFE CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

In fiscal year 2005, federal prosecutors in the United States charged 1,447 child exploitation cases involving child pornography, coercion, and enticement offenses against 1,503 defendants. The goal of Project Safe Childhood is to enhance the national response to this growing threat to America’s youth, and new cases are expected to increase significantly under the Project Safe Childhood program.

In response to the Department of Justice’s Project Safe Childhood initiative, each U.S. Attorney’s office will work to establish an effective partnership with the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task forces or other law enforcement groups to target child predators. Currently, ICAC is a national network of 46 regional task forces funded by the Department’s Office of Justice Programs. The ICAC task forces have been protecting America’s children since 1998. This year, the Department of Justice will award more than \$14 million to the ICAC program in conjunction with PSC. Louisiana’s ICAC is a component of the Louisiana Department of Justice under the leadership of the Louisiana Attorney General.

In addition to the ICAC task forces, U.S. Attorneys Offices will partner with their federal investigative counterparts, other state and local law enforcement officials and community partners in their districts. In developing these partnerships and in fashioning strategic plans in consultation with their partners, U.S. Attorneys will address the five core elements of the PSC initiative:

Greater integration of law enforcement efforts. Federal, state, and local law enforcement officials will become more coordinated in investigating and prosecuting child exploitation cases, and in identifying and rescuing victims.

Local execution of leads from national operations. There are several ongoing national investigations and programs—investigative leads and victim-identification leads from the National Center

for Missing and Exploitation Children (NCMEC), and nationwide investigations of distribution mechanisms such as file servers or websites conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and others, and coordinated by the US Justice Department Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. Local Project Safe Childhood partnerships are ideally situated to pursue the local leads that are generated from these national operations.

Increased federal involvement in child pornography and enticement cases. Given the beneficial investigative tools and the stiffer penalties oftentimes available under federal law, U.S. Attorneys and the federal investigative agencies will be expected to increase the number of child sexual exploitation investigations and prosecutions. The goal is to ensure the worst offenders get the maximum amount of jail time possible.

Training of federal, state, and local law enforcement. A primary goal of Project Safe Childhood is to substantially increased the number of officers and prosecutors who are properly trained to investigate and prosecute computer-facilitated crimes against children. Members of the Project Safe Childhood partnerships will therefore attend training programs facilitated by NCMEC, the ICAC program, and other ongoing programs.

Community awareness and educational programs. Project Safe Childhood will partner with existing national public awareness and educational programs that exist through NCMEC and the ICAC program, as well as other federal, state, and local prevention programs, in order to raise regional and national awareness about the threat of online sexual predators and child pornographers, and to provide the tools and information to parents and youngsters seeking to use the Internet responsibly or to report possible violations.

NAME	AGE, HOMETOWN	CHARGE
ERWIN, Paul Edward	Age 60 Pineville, La	Distribution of child pornography; possession of child pornography; possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.
KRETZER JR, Karl David	Age 42 Greenwell Springs, LA	Using a facility in interstate commerce to attempt to coerce a minor to engage in criminal sexual acts.
MCHEHEE, Dennis James	Age 51 Lake Charles, LA	Possession of child pornography
WILLIAMS, Michael Anthony	Age 34 Ragley, La	Possession of child pornography
DAVIS, John	Age 71	Attempted production of child pornography
KERSTEN, Roger Leo	Age 50 Metairie, La	Attempted production of child pornography
ROBERTS, Randy A.	Age 32 Morgan City, La	Production of child pornography; possession of child pornography
SANTAMARIA, Carolos, Miguel	Age 22 Lafayette, La	Possession of child pornography; receiving child pornography
YEAGER, David R.	Age 24 Doyline, LA	Attempted production of child pornography; attempt to solicit minor to engage in criminal sexual activity
WOODS, James Luther	Age 33 Keithville, La	possession of child pornography
WOODS, Robert Eglin	Age 31 Keithville, La	possession of child pornography
CLULEE JR, Warren J.		Possession of child pornography; transmission of child pornography